

Music of Senegal

THEME: LEISURE (MUSIC)

LANGUAGE: FRENCH

STANDARDS: COMMUNICATION CULTURES CONNECTIONS COMPARISONS
1.1 1.2 1.3 2.1 2.2 3.1 3.2 4.2

Purpose:

To use all four modalities to expose students to examples of language from *le monde francophone* through music.

Communicative Functions:

- *Personal:* Expressing one's thoughts and feelings (likes/dislikes)
- *Interpersonal:* Asking about and sharing thoughts and opinions
- *Referential:* Talking about things in the environment; describing; understanding descriptions; interpreting information; summarizing; supporting opinions
- *Imaginative:* Discussing a style of music

Time Frame:

Eight class periods of approximately 50 minutes each. (The lessons are presented sequentially but do not necessarily have to be taught on eight consecutive days.)

Materials Needed:

- Video "Lions of Dakar" (see resources; description provided)
- VCR and TV
- Questions to accompany video (provided)
- Cloze task for listening activity to accompany video (provided)
- Ismaël Lo's CD, *Iso* (see resources)
- CD player

Level:

Intermediate-Low

Language Structure(s):

Past (*passé composé*) and present tenses

Cultural Aspects:

Introduction to the music of Senegal and exploration of social and cultural issues present in the target culture.

Modalities:

Listening

Speaking

Reading

Writing

NOTES

- Lyrics in French and English for “Nabou” (provided)
- Glossaries or dictionaries
- Handout for sharing opinions activity (provided)
- Rubric for assessing writing (provided)
- Questions for peer review (provided)

Description of the Unit:

In this unit students will learn about a type of popular music in Senegal called Mbalax. It is a music of the Wolofs, the main ethnic group in the Dakar region. The basis of the unit will be a video about this music called “Lions of Dakar,” which includes information about Mbalax music, interviews with the well-known musicians who play this music, and several live performances or music video of these and other Mbalax musicians playing (see detailed description of the video). They will also examine the lyrics of a Mbalax song and will engage in listening activities, a jigsaw reading task, an interactive task, and a writing activity. Each lesson is intended to take approximately one 50-minute class session.

Lesson 1:

Pre-viewing activity:

As a whole class, students brainstorm in French as the teacher writes on the board or an overhead various types of music found in the U.S. (e.g., *le jazz, les blues, le rock, le rap, la musique classique, le zydeco*, etc...). The teacher asks whether any of these styles of music can be associated with ethnic groups (some students may be surprised to know that many have African-American roots). The teacher then introduces the video “Lions of Dakar” by stating that there are many ethnic groups in Senegal and that the video will focus on the music of the main ethnic group in the region of Dakar (the class could take a quick look at the map of Senegal if they need to be reminded that Dakar is the capital).

During-viewing activity:

Students watch the video and respond to questions on a handout (provided). (A brief description of the video is provided). The teacher

will fast-forward through a few sections, including the last part of some of the songs, since they are quite long, in Wolof, and many of the images are repeated throughout the songs. The video is 50 minutes in length but can be shortened to 40 minutes with the fast-forwarding to be able to fit this and the previewing activity into the 55-minute class period. If the students do not finish responding to the questions during the video, they will be expected to finish them before class the next day. People in the video speak in French and Wolof, for which there are subtitles in English, and one British critic speaks in English. The questions are provided along with possible answers.

Note: It is interesting to point out that N'Dour is gracefully switching back and forth between Wolof and French as he speaks. He speaks mostly in Wolof in this section, interjecting French words and phrases here and there. With the video paused, the teacher could ask students to surmise why he blends French with his Wolof.

Lesson 2:

Post-viewing activity/Assessment (continued from day one):

Students will share their responses to the questions on the video in a whole class setting; students are responsible for checking their own answers. Various points could be elaborated on in a discussion format (still in English). The teacher collects papers to check them/give points, then returns them to students to save for future reference. From this point on all activities should be conducted in French unless otherwise noted.

Pre-listening activity:

Students receive the written portion of the cloze passage (provided) and scan for cognates, circling them and then comparing what they've found with a partner. They try to identify the general topic of the passage.

Cloze passage listening activity:

Working individually, students listen to the segment showing the speakers on the video "Lions of Dakar" 2-3 times, filling in as many of the words as they can. (They could glance at the video, but there aren't really any strong visual cues to indicate what is being said as it just shows the speaker's face. Of course, the English subtitles will be covered! Also note that the passage includes two different people speaking.)

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Post-listening activity:

Once the video segment has been played a third time, students do a modified interactive peer correcting activity whereby they orally share their responses with their partner and supply the answer for a word their partner was not able to fill in. Once students have had a chance to do this, in a whole class setting the teacher or other students supply class members with any responses they could not understand. Finally, back in pairs, students work to come up with a brief oral summary of what each person in the video is saying. They then share this with the class. Additional linguistic items can be pointed out: the different accents of the spoken French; “*beaucoup beaucoup*” is used to emphasize a lot (a common error students make is “*très beaucoup*”); the style of and repetition included in this spoken language, and how this would be different from a written text.

Assessment:

Successful completion of the tasks acts as an assessment of comprehension.

Lesson 3:

Pre-reading:

Students listen to the song “Nabou” (sung in Wolof) and in groups of three briefly discuss the following questions (in English):

- In what language is the song sung and why do you think it’s in this language?
- What else do you notice about the song (ie, in terms of instruments used, rhythm, traditional vs. modern sounds, etc.)?

Groups then share their responses with the whole class.

The class will then receive the lyrics to the song in French (provided). In pairs, students are to underline key vocabulary and structures that present difficulties. The teacher helps to explain necessary vocabulary and structures. Some vocabulary words that may present difficulties for students at this level are:

tu me manques	une épouse
des repas	selon
chercher	vivre
les autres	une demeure
souhaiter	s'empêcher
que tu sois	

Individually, students should circle the verbs in the song and identify the tenses. Then, as a whole class they should review the formation of the present and passé composé.

Jigsaw Reading Activity:

Students will be informed that while working in groups during this lesson, they should focus on these group social skills: (1) encourage everyone to participate, (2) ask for help or clarification, and (3) offer to explain or clarify (Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1993, pp. 5-6).

Divide the class into “home groups” having three students each for a jigsaw activity (Kagan, 1989, cited in Shrum & Glisan, 1994). Students are to decide who will take on which of the following positions when they’re working in their home groups:

- reader/checker of understanding (initially reads the song aloud to others and checks for group members’ understanding during post-reading group activities)
- reporter (reports the group’s interpretation to the whole class)
- recorder (takes notes on instructions and group’s discussion)

The reader reads the song aloud to others as they read silently to themselves to begin to have a general understanding of the gist of the whole song.

New “expert groups” are formed for an in-depth reading for meaning of certain portions of the song. The students form three new “expert” groups based on their role in the home group. In other words, all readers form a group, all reporters, and all recorders. Each of these larger groups is assigned a portion of the lyrics:

Readers: Lines 1 – 7

Reporters: Lines 8 – 13

Recorders: Lines 14 – 19

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Each expert group is assigned with analyzing the meaning of their section and writing a 2-3 sentence summary in French (they should be discouraged from lifting phrases straight from the song). Some English may be spoken among students at this point to discuss and clarify meaning. Once the expert groups have had ample time to analyze their section of the song, students return to their home groups with a written summary.

Post-reading:

In home groups, starting with readers, each member takes a turn sharing their summary of their part of the song with the other group members. Again, some English may be spoken at this point to discuss and clarify meaning. By the end of this stage groups should have a good understanding of the meaning of the song and should be ready to discuss the message.

Before students attempt to come up with an overall summary of the message, the teacher guides students in brainstorming possible themes (e.g., *le mariage, la tradition, la perte d'un frère ou d'une sœur*).... Students discuss the meaning of the lyrics and attempt to interpret the message(s) they think the singer wishes to convey. Again, some English may be spoken at this point to discuss and clarify meaning. The teacher will emphasize that because this is interpretation, there is no right or wrong answer, but the group should be able to back up their interpretation with references to the song's lyrics. Each home group is to create a 1-3 sentence explanation of what message(s) they think the singer is conveying. The recorder writes down this explanation.

Note: While the students are working in expert groups and home groups, the teacher circulates to answer students' questions and help guide them in their comprehension and interpretation. During the post-reading activity with the whole class, if necessary, the teacher can ask guiding questions to clarify a base group's interpretation.

The reporter for each home group shares their group's interpretation of the song with the whole class. S/he should be able to explain on what lyrics their interpretation is based. The class could discuss, or compare and contrast, the varying interpretations (in French or English, depending on the students' level). The teacher should briefly summarize family structure and the traditional pressure on young women to marry in Senegal. It is important to explore with students the "whys" underlying this tradition. (For example, it is common in cultures that rely heavily on farming to encourage early marriages to maximize the number of children; such traditions are still practiced in some cultures in the U.S. which also have relied historically or do rely currently on farming—e.g., the Amish and the Hmong.)

Finally, in their home groups, students reflect (in English) on the group process and discuss whether they included the above-stated social skills while working in groups. Which of the skills need improvement? What is challenging about such group work? What do they like/dislike about the group work?

Assessment:

Students' comprehension can be assessed on the basis of their successful completion of the tasks.

Lesson 4:

Pre-speaking activities:

First, students will brainstorm different characteristics of songs about which they may form an opinion (for example, rhythm [*le rythme*], instruments [*les instruments*], style [*le style*], lyrics [*les paroles*], message [*le message*] etc). These French terms should be written across the chalkboard horizontally, so that aspects of these characteristics can be listed underneath them, which is the next step.

Example:	<i>le rythme</i>	<i>les instruments</i>
	lent	le sabar
	moyen	le tam-tam
	rapide	la guitare
	énergique	la trompette

Students will take notes on these expressions for future use.

Then, students will take notes on various ways to express opinions and the teacher will provide examples.

Expressions pour exprimer une opinion:

Je pense que...
 Je crois que...
 Je trouve que...
 je crois/trouve/pense que...
 À mon avis...
 D'après moi...
 Pour moi...
 Aussi:
 J'aime...parce que...
 Je n'aime pas...parce que...

Speaking activity:

Students are given a handout (provided) that they are to complete upon talking to five different classmates. The handout includes space to write the classmates' names and jot down their opinions. Students are to mingle and ask one of their classmates the questions, while the classmates answer, attempting to use a variety of the structures for expressing opinions. Students then jot down their classmates' answers in French (one- or two-word answers are acceptable here; complete sentences are not required). A pair of students should switch roles before moving on to someone else. The activity is completed when all students have had a chance to talk to five different people, and their sheets are filled in.

Post-speaking/follow-up activity:

In a whole class setting, the teacher asks students to share their classmates' opinions. For example, she can name a specific student and other students share that student's opinion (this incorporates practice using the opinion structures in the third person).

Example: Teacher: Qu'est-ce que Marie pense de la chanson?
 Student: Elle trouve que la chanson est très jolie...

Assessment:

Successful completion of the task provides an indication of students' ability to use structures to form opinions. The teacher should circulate throughout the interactive task to ensure students are speaking French.

Preparation for writing activity:

For the rest of the hour, the teacher will distribute and introduce the writing assignment below, and any remaining time can be used by students to start the pre-writing stage.

Writing Assignment:

Imagine that you have a Senegalese penpal, Aya, who lives in Dakar. Aya has already introduced you to her favorite type of music from her region, Mbalax, and its most famous musicians, Youssou N'Dour and Ismaël Lo. On her suggestions, you bought some of their music and also happened to see a show about them on TV! You've even discovered that there's a web site where you can access some of their music. Now Aya is writing to ask

a favor of you. With African music having increased in popularity around the world, her school newspaper editor has asked her to do an article on it for an upcoming issue. Aya would like you to send her a paragraph or two about your reactions to the Mbalax music with which you're familiar. For guidelines, she has sent you the following questions to respond to:

- Qu'est-ce que tu penses de la musique Mbalax que tu connais?
- Quelle est ta chanson préférée et pourquoi?

At this stage students will also be informed of how their writing will be assessed. They will be shown the multitrait rubric which will be used to evaluate their writing, and the teacher will explain and elaborate so that it is clear to the students.

Lesson 5:

Pre-writing:

As preparation for the writing assignment, students will listen to 3-4 additional songs of their choice by the Mbalax musicians, either on the videotape, on the compact discs by Ismaël Lo or Youssou N'Dour, or on the web site for the Mbalax music (see resources below). They should take notes about the music as they listen to it—about aspects they discussed while talking about the “Nabou” song, *le rythme, les instruments*, etc, and if they watch any of the videos, they can make comments about the visuals, as well. These are notes for their own purposes only; the teacher will encourage them to write them in French, but if they write some in English, that's okay. Students will have time in class to listen to this music. Copies of the French and English lyrics of the songs on the CD's should be made available to them so they can know what the songs are about. All of the songs from all sources are sung in Wolof except “*La Femme sans haine*,” which is in French, and “Shakin' the Tree,” which is partly in English and partly in Wolof.

A brief whole-class review of the structures students have learned to express opinions and describe the music will help prepare students to be able to do the writing assignment. They will be encouraged to refer to their notes on the vocabulary, structures, and possibly the video while they are listening to the music and jotting down information, and while they are writing their drafts. They can also think about the lyrics and the messages they think the singers wish to convey.

Lesson 6:

Pre-writing (continued):

Students do a webbing activity to help organize their thoughts about the songs they've listened to and/or watched, and any other information about the music (ie, from the video) they would like to include.

Writing:

Students will create a first draft, using their webbing, their notes on vocabulary, structures, and other notes on the music.

Lesson 7:

Peer Review Activity:

Once students have done a first draft, they do a peer review activity with a partner where they read their partner's paper and give them feedback using the peer review questions provided.

Students can then make revisions based on their partner's feedback and turn in the second and first drafts along with the peer review to the teacher by the end of the hour.

The teacher reviews students' papers, making positive comments and suggestions for improvements, and returns them to students on the next day.

Lesson 8:

Students make final revisions based on the suggestions on draft 2 and turn in their final draft the following day.

Assessment:

Students' writing can be assessed using the multitrail rubric provided.

Extensions:

NOTES

Suggestions for adapting the task for various levels:

For beginning levels: Class discussions will be conducted in English. Students could underline cognates and familiar words in the text. They will skim the lyrics for the main ideas and write them in their own words in English.

For advanced levels: Class discussions will be conducted entirely in French.

Other extensions:

Instead of responding to the writing task described in the unit, students can communicate via e-mail with high school students in Senegal, France, Canada, or the U.S. and exchange opinions about Mbalax music.

Cultural extensions:

- Students can explore the history of Mbalax music and examine its influence on other kinds of music both within and outside of Senegal.
- Groups of students can be assigned to explore other types of Senegalese music and report their findings to the class.

References and Resources:

Chamberlain, A., & Steele, R. (1985). *Guide pratique de la communication* (p. 49). Paris: Les Éditions Didier.

Johnson, D., Johnson, R., & Holubec, E. (1993). *Cooperation in the classroom* (2:11 & 5:6). Edina, MN: Interaction Book Company.

Kagan, S. (1989). *Cooperative learning: Resources for teachers*. San Juan Capistrano, CA: Resources for Teachers.

Shrum, J., & Gilsan, E. (1994). *Teacher's handbook: Contextualized language instruction* (pp. 149, 289, 299). Boston: Heinle and Heinle Publishers.

Tedick, D. J., & Klee, C. A. (1998). Alternative assessment in the foreign language classroom. In G. S. Burkart (Ed.), *Modules for professional preparation of teaching assistants in foreign languages*. Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics.

NOTES

Compact disc: Ismaël Lo, *Iso*. (1994). Song: "Nabou." Mango/Island Records (France). Lyric reprint: Polygram International Publishing.

Compact disc: Youssou N'Dour. (1989). *The lion*. Virgin Records, Ltd.

Video Tape: *Lions of Dakar*. (1990). New York: Gessler Publishing.

Musiques Afro-Caribéennes:

<http://www.afromix.org/disco/styles/mbalax/index.fr.html>

<http://www.afromix.org/disco/pays/senegal/index.fr.html>

Reflections:

General Description and Review of the Video “Lions of Dakar”

This video is about music in Dakar, capital of Senegal. It focuses on the Mbalax music of Dakar. The video shows several live performances by well-known musicians Youssou N’Dour, Ismaël Lo, Super Diamono, and others. It includes several clips of interviews with these musicians, in which they describe various aspects of their music. There are also commentaries by a French and an English music critic. All but the English critic speak in French, and Youssou N’Dour switches back and forth between French and Wolof, a traditional language of Senegal. There are subtitles in English. The songs performed by N’Dour and Lo are sung in Wolof; the songs by other musicians are in Wolof also.

The main strength of this video is its wide variety of cultural aspects. The musicians explain how their music originates in traditional Wolof music, Mbalax, and how it conveys Senegalese culture. They discuss the use and influence of non-African instruments along with traditional instruments such as the tam-tam and sabar drums. They talk about the various themes and messages in their music, how they wish to benefit people and help lead them in the right direction. They also talk about becoming popular throughout the world.

The usage of French in most of the interviews and Wolof in the songs is another cultural and historical point. It brings up issues of who their audience is and how they wish to convey their messages.

In addition, in the live performances, which have the appearance of music videos, there are many aspects of life in Dakar and Senegal. Several common threads in these performances are: the music is very lively, and musicians all seem very happy while playing; people of all ages are happily dancing to the music; in many scenes the band and other people are on the beach surrounded by sand, ocean, blue sky, and palm trees; people are wearing colorful clothing—some traditional, some Western; people are going about everyday life (men fishing, women carrying large buckets or bundles on their heads, weaving baskets...); young men are playing soccer; and more. So many themes could be drawn out with these visuals, and many observations could be made about the people, climate, and land.

A potential weakness is that there is no clear organization to the video. It’s a documentary style that jumps back and forth between commentaries (by either a European critic or a Senegalese musician) and performances. However, despite the lack of organization, there is a variety of information in the video that could be used comprehensively or selectively.

Questions for “Lions of Dakar” Videotape

1. List images you see in the performance sections of the video.
2. List the names of the Senegalese singers who are performing, being interviewed, or talked about in the video.
3. Why does French critic François Post think African music became popular in the world?
4. As it says in the video, there are many ethnic groups in Senegal, each with its own rhythm or style of music. Describe the Mbalax music: what ethnic group does it represent and upon what instrument is it based?
5. Explain how the musician Baobab says that foreign instruments are used in African music.
6. What do Ismaël Lo and Youssou N'Dour say about the purpose of their music?

Possible answers to the “Lions of Dakar” questions:

1. There are musicians playing and singing, a lot of beach scenes, sunshine, palm trees, ocean, people dancing, looking happy, playing soccer, fishing, doing other types of work such as making a boat, weaving, women carrying large containers on their heads.
2. Super Diamono, Youssou N’Dour, Ismaël Lo, Balla Sidibe, Baobab [Gouye Gui], Soriba Kouyate, Moussa N’Gom
3. With the emerging popularity of reggae in the 70’s and 80’s, people wanted something new; France was connected with Senegal because it’s a former French colony and there is a large Senegalese population in Paris; this connection helped Senegalese music become known outside of Senegal
4. Wolof ethnic group; based on the rhythm of the sabar drum
5. He says the African cannot use these to create a false African sound, but they complement the tam-tam drum and their other instruments. Note: there are visuals of the sabar and tam-tam drums, as well as other instruments, which can be pointed out as the video plays.
6. Lo says that musicians have a duty to say real things, to sing about such topics as tradition, apartheid, and love. N’Dour says that his songs are about a lot of things, about life. He says that African singers should convey messages that will benefit the people...because there aren’t many ways to reach the people and let everybody understand what is going on in the world. He says that the musician will benefit from making people aware and leading them in the right direction.

Cloze Task for Lesson 2 from the video **Lions of Dakar**.

FRANÇOIS POST:

Au Sénégal chaque ethnie—en fait en Afrique chaque _____ a son propre rythme et _____ sa propre musique. Donc l'ethnie dominante dans la région de Dakar _____ les Wolofs qui ont leur propre _____ qui s'appelle Mbalax et les plus _____ représentants de Mbalax sont Youssou N'Dour et Ismaël Lo.

YOUSSOU N'DOUR:

Le Sénégal c'est un petit pays mais _____ c'est un grand pays parce que nous avons _____ de richesses, beaucoup de sectes, beaucoup de ... nous _____ la religion musulman qui est une chose... qui mélange _____ la culture ici. Nous avons beaucoup _____ de musique, c'est à dire nous pouvons _____ la musique Wolof, la musique Peul, _____ qui vient de la Casamance, la musique Serer, et donc tout ça _____ une richesse.

Example of completed cloze passage:

FRANÇOIS POST:

Au Sénégal chaque ethnie—en fait en Afrique chaque ethnie a son propre rythme et développe sa propre musique. Donc l'ethnie dominante dans la région de Dakar sont les Wolofs qui ont leur propre rythme qui s'appelle Mbalax et les plus grands représentants de Mbalax sont Youssou N'Dour et Ismaël Lo.

YOUSSOU N'DOUR:

Le Sénégal c'est un petit pays mais culturellement c'est un grand pays parce que nous avons beaucoup de richesses, beaucoup de sectes, beaucoup de ... nous avons la religion musulman qui est une chose... qui mélange avec la culture ici. Nous avons beaucoup beaucoup de musique, c'est à dire nous pouvons prendre la musique Wolof, la musique Peul, musique qui vient de la Casamance, la musique Serer, et donc tout ça forme une richesse.

NABOU

Nabou, petite sœur
tu me manques
le matin
je vais dans ta chambre
à l'heure des repas
chacun de nous te cherche
Nabou, tu nous manques
comme les autres, tu as voulu te marier
notre mère a souhaité que tu sois une
épouse selon la tradition
Nabou, vivre à deux est difficile
c'est un contrat entre un homme et toi
pour une nouvelle demeure
chaque matin
je ne peux m'empêcher
d'entrer dans ta chambre
mais je sais ton absence
Nabou, sois heureuse et amoureuse
dans ta nouvelle demeure

NABOU

(English version from the CD jacket)

Nabou, my sister, I miss you
everyday I go to your room
At dinner time we look for you
Nabou dear, we all miss you
Like others you went to get wed
mother told you be a good wife
and follow our tradition
matrimony is not easy
it's a contract of mutual trust
in a new home
every day I can't help it
I go and look into your room
though I know that you are gone
I wish you much joy and love
in your new home

Multitrait Rubric for Writing Task

Music of Senegal

	EXPRESSES OPINION	PROVIDES SUPPORTING DETAILS	LANGUAGE CONTROL
3	Uses many different expressions to state opinions.	Supplies many details to support opinion. Includes a variety of information about the music, the message, and cultural information.	Good language control; good range of well-chosen vocabulary, accuracy and variety of grammatical structures.
2	Uses some different expressions to state opinions.	Supplies some details to support opinions. Includes some information about the music, the message, and cultural information.	Adequate language control; vocabulary range is lacking; frequent grammatical errors that do not obscure meaning; little variety in structures.
1	Uses very few or no expressions to state opinions.	Supplies very few or no details to support opinions. Includes little or no information about the music, the message, and cultural information.	Weak language control; very limited vocabulary base; frequent grammatical errors even in simple structures that at times obscure meaning.

Adapted from Tedick & Klee (1999)

Sharing Opinions about “Nabou”

Nom	Est-ce que tu aimes la chanson “Nabou”? Pourquoi/pourquoi pas?

Peer Review Activity for Music of Senegal

Name of the writer _____

Name of the reviewer _____

1. Are the writer's opinions of the music clear? What are they? Where could they be clearer?
2. Are there any sections you don't understand? Where?
3. What do you like about the writer's message to Aya?
4. Does the writer use a variety of expressions to express his/her opinion? List them below. What other expressions might you suggest to the writer?

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